Released for Press use

NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 68. TORONTO October, 1946

EARLY GUNS WERE POOR

The Canadian hunter of 1946 carries a dependable, straight-shooting gun. Very different was the flint-lock still in wide use a century ago. It's maximum range was 150 yards. It was inconvenient to use, uncertain enough in good weather, worse in bad.

Our great grandfather used a flintlock, such as those on display in the Royal Ontario Museum. In order to use his gun, he had to cast his bullets, round pellets of lead and test the black powder which was very variable in quality. To load his weapon, he measured out a quantity of powder, poured it down the barrel and over this tamped in a piece of wadding. The lead ball was dropped in, and was held in place by another piece of wadding. Finally a little powder was sprinkled on the firing pan. On pulling the trigger, a spark formed by the impact of flint on steel, ignited the trail of powder which in turn set off the powder inside. Its explosion propelled the lead shot. Much of the power was lost, since the shot fitted the bore loosely and the flint-lock had no rifling.

A BIRD IN THE HAND

There's a lot in the exactness of a term, according to ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum.. If a hunter bags a Woodcock, that's legal and the bird can make a dainty dish. If he bags a Cock-of-the-Woods, that's illegal and he might as well eat crow.

The Woodcock is a plump, big-eyed member of the shorebird family, whose plumage matches the russet and brown of October leaves. Though its members have sadly diminished, Ontario still lists it as game. The Cock-of-the-Woods is a big black-and-white, scarlet-capped Woodpecker. It has increased somewhat in settled Ontario and should receive every protection because it imparts a special flavour to the woodland scene by its boisterous call and striking plumage.

GRAPHITE AIDS SELF EXPRESSION

It is a widely accepted view that "the pen is mightier than the sword," and by the same taken, the lowly pencil should come in for its share of glory. The "lead" of pencils is formed of the mineral graphite, mixed with fine clay, the name graphite being derived from the Greek word meaning "to write." It is found in distant parts of the world, but also in Canada, examples of the natural mineral in the Royal Ontario Museum having been taken from the Ottawa valley. Artificial graphite has been manufactured in this country also, and possibly the "lead" in the pencil you used today came from Niagara Falls.

BIG GAME OF THE PAST

A mastodon skeleton on display at the Royal Ontario Museum was found in Welland County, and stands about 10 feet high, the single remaining tusk in this specimen curving out about 7 feet. This gigantic elephant-like animal, when his bones were covered with flesh, would have looked like big stuff to the hunter today.

OPAL FOR OCTOBER

Who can look into an opal without seeing a rainbow? We don't have to look skywards to see a lovely array of colours because here is one gem stone that has no distinctive colour because it combines in itself all of the colours. Opal has another distinguishing feature as it is one of the very few minerals which will never form in a crystal. It is a solidified jelly composed of silica with a small and somewhat variable amount of water. In the precious varieties of opal, this jelly-like mass in the process of hardening was traversed by a multitude of small cracks. It is the presence of these cracks which were later filled with a deposit of opal that gives this remarkable gem its play of colour. This feature is particularly apparent in the precious opal, all varieties such as black opal, fire opal, wood opal, on display at the Royal Ontario Museum having equally interesting features.

A tradition of ill luck has been attributed to this beautiful gem stone. Perhaps that is because the very character of the structure of the opal gem has in it elements of disaster. As one would expect, any stone, so filled with small cracks is in danger of permanent fracture. And surely, the loss of a prized possession is enough of a misfortune to justify the legend.

TAPESTRY IS LEONARD BEQUEST

Specially featured at the Royal Ontario Museum from October 10th to 20th will be a Gothic Tapestry, one of many gifts of the Reuben Wells Leonard Estate. It is typical of the late Gothic period, and is probably Flemish, early 16th century. Several scenes woven into a single tapestry depict the Trojan war in rich colour and fine design. This acquisition will prove a very valuable one to the Museum's collections, giving as it does interesting examples of costume, armour and textiles. After the special exhibition, the tapestry will hang in the Museum's permanent collections.

COMING EVENTS AT THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

An exhibition of ancient musical instruments, planned to coincide with Symphony Week, will open at the Museum for two weeks commencing October 1st. The three main features will be cases of Chinese and Indian instruments, of drums and rattles, and smaller cases of other countries. Accompanying instruments such as spinets, harpsichords, clavichords and pianos will also be displayed.

Currently on display are specimens of birds donated by Mr. O. D. Boggs, who in the course of his technical work in Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Arctic Canada has garnered more than 1,000 ornithological specimens for the Museum.

Saturday Morning Club for children will start its activities October 19th. Plans for this year include projects in archery, reed pipes and studies of animals in art.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM LUNCHROOM

For the convenience of Museum visitors, the Museum lunchroom is open:

Tuesday through Saturday: Lunch 12 to 2. Tea 3 to 5.
Sunday: Tea 3 to 5.

Special services and rates on request for visiting schools.